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AUTHOR Anderson, Judith
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ABSTRACT

Many recent school-reform efforts have called for increasing decision-making power at the local school level. This report examines state differences in the amount of control that public school teachers believe they have over establishing curriculum; selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; and selecting topics, content, and skills to be taught in their classrooms. Teachers' views on control over school policy and classroom practices were analyzed based on data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) of 1990-91. SASS, a nationally representative survey of teachers, as well as school districts, schools, and principals, is conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The 1990-91 survey collected information from more than 53,000 public and private school teachers. The data show large differences across the states in the amount of control that teachers believe they have over determining curriculum, texts, and course content. In general, teachers in the southern and southeastern states report the least control over establishing curriculum, selecting texts, and determining content, while their colleagues in northern New England and the north central states report the most. Three figures and one table are included. Contains three references. (LMI)

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Research Report

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October 1995

Who's in Charge? State Differences in Public School Teachers' Perceptions of Their Control Over Determining Curriculum, Texts, and Course Content

Many recent school reform efforts have called for increasing the decision-making power at the local school level. How much control do teachers have over school policy and classroom decisions? Recent calls for increases in school-based management would suggest that teachers currently may not play a key role in many school decisions. School-based management varies from school to school, but generally it gives increased budgeting, curriculum, and staffing responsibilities to principals and teachers or to parents and community members in conjunction with school staff. The influence each group has varies from school to school, but the goal is the same: to improve children's schooling.

Implicit in this call for greater school-level influence is the belief that those closest to the children—principals, teachers, parents, and community members—know best what is needed to improve their schools. In a prior report (*U.S. Department of Education, 1994*), we found that teachers did not believe that they had much control over policies on discipline, inservice programs, ability grouping, or curriculum; but that they were more likely to feel in control of classroom practices such as selecting teaching techniques, evaluating and grading students, and determining the amount of homework.

Nationwide,

- 35 percent of teachers believed that they have considerable influence over establishing curriculum;
- 55 percent reported that they have influence over selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; and
- 60 percent felt that they are in control of selecting the content, topics, and skills to be taught.

The purpose of this report is to examine state differences in the amount of control that public school teachers believe that they have over these areas. Teachers' views on control over school policy and classroom practices are analyzed based on data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) of 1990–91. SASS, a nationally representative survey of teachers, as well as school districts, schools, and principals, is conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The 1990–91 teacher survey collected information from more than 53,000 public and private school teachers. The data here reflect public school teachers' reports of conditions and not independent observations of actual decision-making—but they are the views of those closest to the education process and who are perhaps in the best position to know what the school conditions actually are.

Establishing Curriculum

While a third of public school teachers nationwide believe that they have considerable influence over curriculum, the range across states is wide: from 17 to 66 percent (See Table 1.)

- In three states (Maryland, Louisiana, and Alabama) and the District of Columbia less than 20 percent of teachers believe that they have much control over establishing curriculum, and less than 30 percent of teachers in nine other states (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) report having much influence in this area.
- In contrast, two-thirds of the teachers in Vermont believe that they have a say in establishing curriculum, as do at least half of the teachers in Maine, Nebraska, Montana, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

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Selecting Textbooks and Other Instructional Materials

Teachers believe that they have somewhat more control over selecting textbooks and other instructional materials than over establishing curriculum, with 55 percent of teachers nationwide reporting a high degree of influence over this area. Once again, however, there are wide variations across the states, from a low of 33 percent to a high of 87 percent (See Figure 2.)

- The five states where teachers report the least control are Louisiana (33 percent), Florida (40 percent), Maryland (41 percent), Alabama and Georgia (43 percent).
- In the six states where teachers report the most control, twice as many teachers report that they have considerable influence over the textbook selection process. These states are Vermont (87 percent), Maine (74 percent), Montana, Iowa, Oklahoma and South Dakota (all at 70 percent).

Selecting Topics, Content, and Skills to be Taught

Nationwide, 60 percent of teachers believe that they have considerable influence over selecting topics, content, and skills to be taught in their classroom, with a range across states from 41 to 80 percent. (See Table 1.)

- The four states where teachers report the least control include Maryland (41 percent), Louisiana (45 percent), Florida (47 percent) and Georgia as well as the District of Columbia (each at 48 percent); while
- The seven states where teachers report the most control include Vermont (80 percent), Hawaii (76 percent), South Dakota (76 percent), Oklahoma (75 percent), Montana (74 percent), Maine and North Dakota (73 percent).

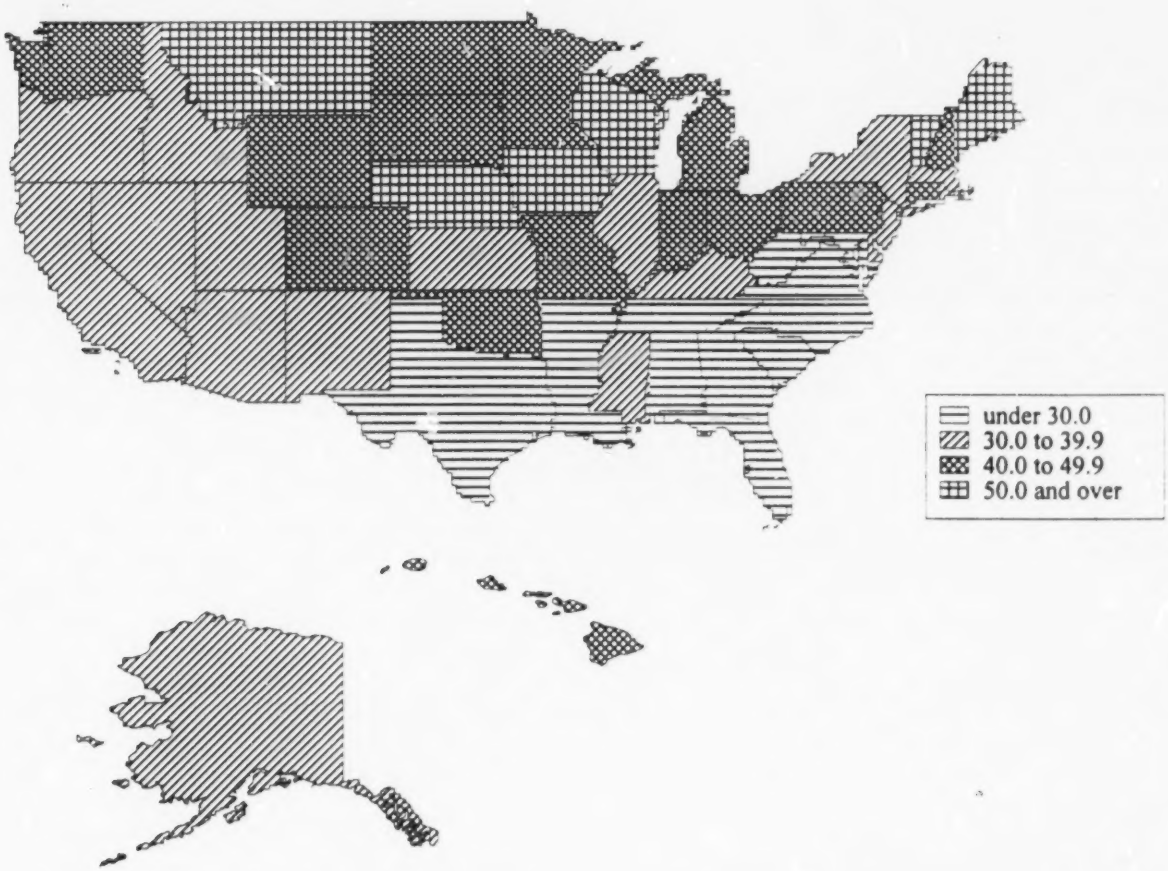
Table 1.—Percentage of public school teachers believing they have significant influence over establishing curriculum; selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; and determining content, topics, and skills to be taught.

	Establishing Curriculum	Selecting Texts	Determining Content
Alabama	19.4	43.0	52.6
Alaska	36.0	56.3	62.1
Arizona	32.6	49.4	59.1
Arkansas	26.3	60.0	50.3
California	35.7	46.9	60.1
Colorado	44.2 !	63.4	63.3
Connecticut	43.4 !	55.7	59.7
Delaware	33.0 !	55.2 !	62.3 !
D.C.	17.8 !	51.3 !	48.1 !
Florida	27.6	39.8	47.2
Georgia	23.2	43.2	48.2
Hawaii	42.1	66.1 !	76.1
Idaho	38.7	57.8	67.2
Illinois	39.1	61.5	64.2
Indiana	40.2	59.2	69.5
Iowa	50.0	69.7	72.4 !
Kansas	38.9	62.5	69.4
Kentucky	35.0	55.0 !	65.4
Louisiana	19.0	33.3	44.6
Maine	56.4 !	73.7	73 0
Maryland	17.0	41.0	41.3
Massachusetts	38.0	59.5	65.2
Michigan	40.5	58.8 !	69.7 !
Minnesota	46.3	63.3	67.6
Mississippi	2.8	53.0	50.5
Missouri	44.5	63.8	64.6
Montana	50.5	69.8	74.3
Nebraska	50.7	64.6	70.1
Nevada	33.3	54.1	59.8 !
New Hampshire	46.4 !	65.9 !	66.6
New Jersey	34.3	57.0	55.3
New Mexico	33.8	64.0	63.7
New York	32.6 !	60.9 !	60.4 !
North Carolina	21.1	49.7	55.5
North Dakota	40.6	68.3	72.7
Ohio	42.7	60.5	64.4
Oklahoma	40.1	69.8	75.1
Oregon	39.5	56.5	62.7
Pennsylvania	44.2	65.2	65.6
Rhode Island	37.8	55.0 !	59.4 !
South Carolina	24.6	46.7	58.9 !
South Dakota	49.1	69.7	75.9
Tennessee	24.3	45.3	53.5
Texas	29.1	45.1	49.1
Utah	34.2	51.4	53.9
Vermont	65.9	87.3	80.4
Virginia	24.7	45.5	53.2
Washington	44.0 !	54.4	62.6
West Virginia	25.9	43.8 !	58.9 !
Wisconsin	50.1 !	63.9	68.2
Wyoming	47.1	67.2	69.0

NOTES. Data are the percent of teachers responding "5" or "6" on a scale that ran from "1" (strongly disagree) to "6" (strongly agree). All estimates in this report are based on samples and are subject to sampling error. Standard errors exceed 2.5 for states marked with a "!". Standard errors should be taken into account when comparing states.

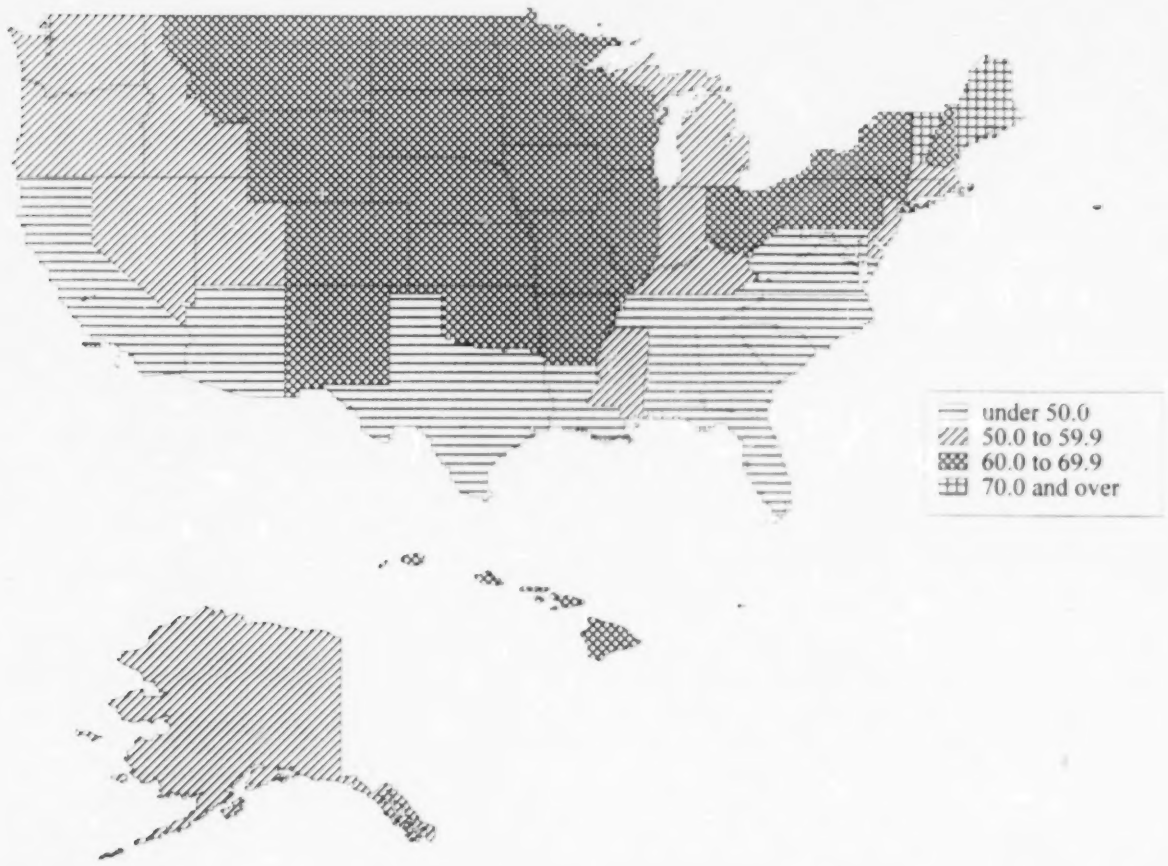
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.

Figure 1.—Percentage of public school teachers reporting that they have considerable influence over establishing curriculum, by state, 1990–91.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.

Figure 2.—Percentage of public school teachers reporting that they have considerable influence over selecting textbooks and other instructional materials, by state, 1990–91.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.

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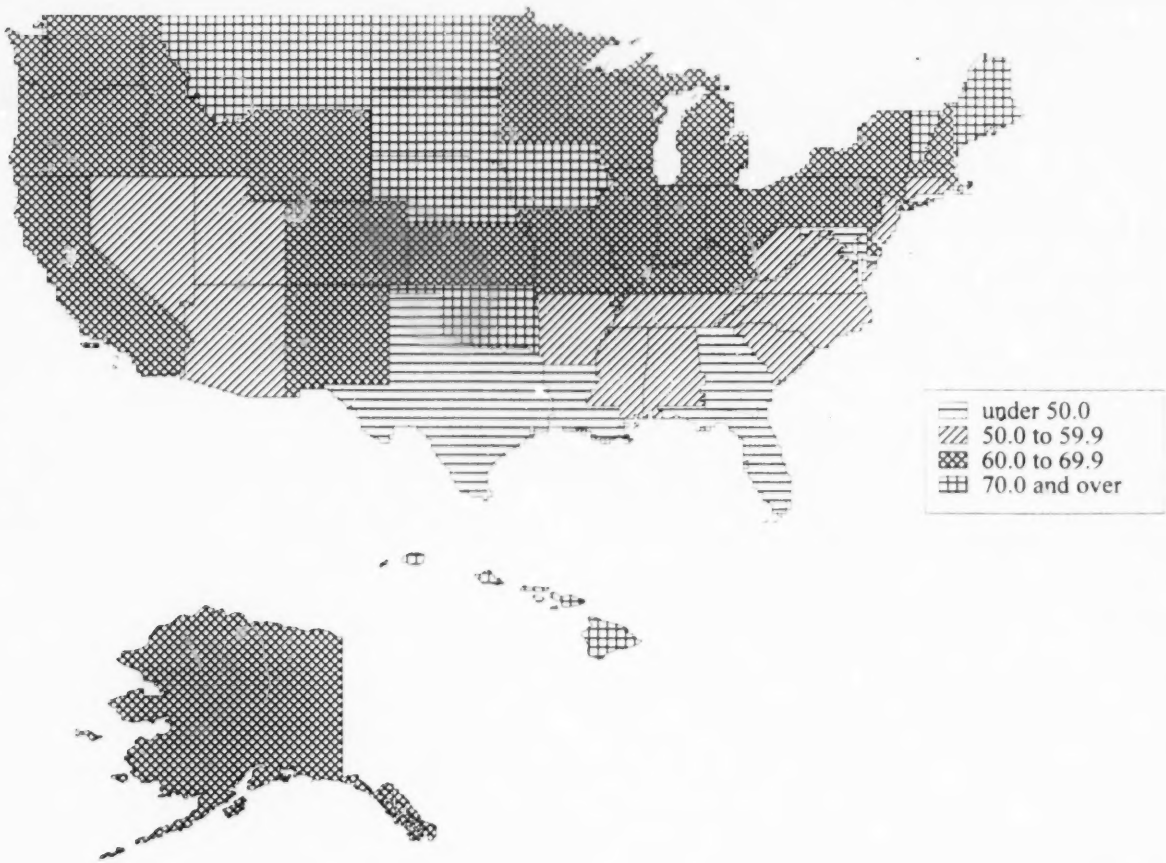
Figure 3.—Percentage of public school teachers reporting that they have considerable influence over determining content, topics, and skills to be taught, by state, 1990–91.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.

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Conclusions

There are large differences across the states in the amount of control teachers believe they have over determining curriculum, texts, and course content. In general, teachers in the southern and southeastern states report the least control over establishing curriculum, selecting texts, and determining content, while their colleagues in northern New England and the north central states report the most. Analysts with a particular interest in school-based management issues may want to examine the historical and state policy influences in states at both ends of the continuum, and the effects of these differences on teacher satisfaction.

NOTES: (1) Teachers were asked to indicate, on a six point scale, how much influence they believed that teachers had over several areas of school policy and classroom practice. The actual questions were: "At this school, how much actual influence, do teachers have over school policy in each of the following areas?—Establishing curriculum" and "At this school, how much control do you feel you have IN YOUR CLASSROOM over each of the following areas of your planning and teaching?—Textbooks and other instructional material and selecting topics, content, and skills to be taught." The figures in this paper are for the percent of teachers answering a "5" or "6".

(2) Standard errors exceed 2.5 for states marked with a "!". Standard errors were calculated using a balanced repeated replicates procedure. An appendix with sample sizes and standard errors is available on request.

Write to *Research Reports*, OERI, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Room 611b, Washington, DC 20208.

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Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education
Sharon P. Robinson, Assistant Secretary, OERI
Judith I. Anderson, Acting Director, At-Risk Institute